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Montana
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TO: Test Coordinators, Special Education Directors, Authorized Representatives

FROM: Judy Snow, State Assessment Director, Office of Public Instruction

DATE: October 2009

SUBJECT: Requesting Your Participation

The Montana Office of Public Instruction is conducting a three-year research project to improve state tests, in particular to identify aspects of tests that can be adapted for students with IEPs who are eligible for a Criterion Referenced Assessment based on Modified Academic Achievement Standards (CRT-M, the “2% option”). The project is funded by the United States Department of Education through a General Supervision Enhancement Grant (GSEG) to the State of Montana. A goal of the project is to better understand how to enhance the MontCAS CRT for 7th and 8th grades reading and mathematics and to use this information to develop a model for a statewide CRT-M.

Last April, twenty-nine schools participated in a computer-based beta test of the CRT-M, which was well-received. The 145 students with IEPs who participated in the study indicated they preferred taking the test on computer as it allowed them to hear the instructions and items read aloud as often as needed using headphones and to submit their responses electronically rather than filling in a bubble sheet. The test administrators stated that the test was easy to download and monitor.

We are inviting schools in your system with students in grades 7 and 8 to participate in the next step of this research. Encouraged by the improved achievement results of the students who took the beta test, the OPI and our partners in this project, Measured Progress and Children’s Progress, plan to conduct a pilot test this school year January through February, 2010. We are applying the lessons learned in the beta test to develop a more comprehensive pilot test, and we wish to include many more students. We think you will be excited about the opportunities this format provides for students with IEPs who struggle with the general assessment.

Participation Responsibilities

If principals and teachers agree to participate, participation will include the following:

- **Register students:** Lists of students will be provided to each school at the Measured Progress iservices web site. You will access this confidential information with your MARS password and user ID.
 - o *Students with IEPs:* We will provide a list of all students with IEPs at your school, and you will select those who meet eligibility criteria. We will provide detailed guidelines to schools in October to identify the appropriate students with IEPs who qualify to participate in the pilot test. We anticipate that approximately 20-40% of your students with IEPs may be eligible. These are students who take the CRT, but persistently perform below proficient and need instructional supports to address grade level content. This will not require a full IEP team meeting, but we recommend that the special education and general education teachers responsible for the student in reading and mathematics (grade 7) and mathematics (grade 8) make the determination.

The Montana Office of Public Instruction provides vision, advocacy, support, and leadership for schools and communities to ensure that all students meet today's challenges and tomorrow's opportunities.

- *General education students:* We will provide schools with a list of randomly selected general education students. We hope that all of the general education students on the list can participate.
- ***Notify parents:*** We will provide principals with an information letter to parents, explaining that participation is voluntary. Their signed consent is not required, but any requests to remove students from the study will be honored.
- ***Provide computer access to each student:*** Each student will participate in one computer-based assessment. Computers with access to the internet, equipped with a mouse and a keyboard, are required. Either Windows (2000 or later) or Mac (OS X 10.3 or later) systems will work. Students will not have to take the test on the same day(s) or in the same location. Practice sessions prior to the pilot will be provided.
- ***Administer the assessment:*** Test administrators will monitor the test sessions, and they and the students will be asked to complete a short survey after taking the test.

Participation Incentives

- Your school will contribute to the decisions that the OPI will make to determine the best way to address the needs of students with disabilities in MontCAS.
- Headphones will be provided for each participating student. The school may elect to keep them or give them to participating students.
- Each school will have the opportunity to be entered into a drawing for one of four computers. Winners will be announced after participation of general and eligible IEP students is confirmed at the end of the test administration window.

Description of the Pilot Test

The CRT-M is comprehensive assessment, covering the same range of objectives in reading at grade 7 and in mathematics at grades 7 and 8 as the general CRT.

- There will be 50 multiple choice items in each test of Mathematics
- There will be 6 passages with 42 items in the reading test.
- All items are multiple choice.

There will be three test sessions for each test containing 10-17 items per session. We anticipate that the students will need the same amount of time for the CRT-M pilot test as they generally need for the CRT, which averages 30-60 minutes per session, up to approximately 180 minutes per student. Directions for test administration will be provided in a Test Administrator's Manual and a Technical Set-up Guide.

This activity will be conducted professionally with strict adherence to ethical and legal requirements. All data will be aggregated and reported in such a way that no participating community, system, school, student, or teacher can be identified.

Important Dates:

- Oct 9-27 (the sooner the better): Schools indicate interest to participate at <http://iservices.measuredprogress.org/>
- October 27: Student registration begins. A list of students (with IEPs and in general education) will be posted at <http://iservices.measuredprogress.org/> for schools to access with their MARS passwords.
- November 18: Student registration ends. This is also the deadline for parents to request removal of their child from the pilot test.
- January 6-February 26: Pilot test administration window.

A webinar with condensed information about the pilot is online at the following address:
<http://connect.opi.mt.gov/p57851942/>

If you have any questions about the pilot test, please contact
Judy Snow, State Assessment Director, jsnow@mt.gov (406-444-3656) or
Dr. Sue Bechard, Project Director, at bechard.sue@measuredprogress.org (603-767-6898).

The Montana Office of Public Instruction looks forward to your participation in this important activity!

Thank you for your interest and support.